

GERMAN HUNTING GUNS OF THE GOLDEN ERA 1840–1940

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INTRODUCTION TO HUNTING

Hunting played an important role in food gathering in all early societies, and that included the Germanic tribes as well. Marksmanship and the ability to handle arms were necessary to defend a town or city anywhere, and citizens were called upon to prepare and train with weapons. These skills became the foundation for a long hunting tradition on the Continent.*

Noble families established vast estates for the primary purpose of hunting. In the Germanic culture, from the royal monarch to the gamekeeper, the pursuit of game and the associated rituals were held in the highest esteem. Rules of sportsmanship and a strict code dictated every aspect of the hunt: from the clean kill and the clothing of the hunter to the salute to the fallen prey at the end of the hunt. The great halls of the hunting lodges were lined with the trophies taken and honored in this manner. Even the language used by the hunting fraternity separated them from nonhunters. Because of the rules decreeing that animals would only be hunted using weapons and techniques worthy of the quarry and because quality was paramount in Teutonic societies, much cultural pride went into the production of fine hunting guns.

Game on the vast land holdings of the ruling classes had been managed for centuries by foresters and gamekeepers in the employ of the aristocracy. Kings and the nobility believed that hunting was their God-given right, and violators who infringed on it were punished severely. Large-scale social hunts were arranged

regularly by nobles on their hunting estates. In many regions, local farmers and their servants were forced to work without compensation on these hunts.

Even though the middle of the nineteenth century brought reforms, state and government lands remained closed to the public for hunting. Wealthy landowners were able to stalk game on their own estates, and less affluent citizens were able to hunt only on leased parcels of land. Likewise, while members of the privileged nobility and the upper class stocked their gun rooms with a multitude of stalking rifles, double-rifles, and shotguns, the majority of the hunting fraternity could afford only one gun for game. This often meant the acquisition of one shotgun or cape gun, or, at a later time, a drilling. It also required that the owner of a combination gun become completely familiar with the firearm in order to master the safeties and varied features of the gun. There was an advantage to the hunter in this. If one sporting arm is always used in a number of different hunting situations, the owner will become expert in its handling.

Combination guns—a break-action hunting firearm that has at least two barrels—had several advantages. One was their versatility. Although they were often thought to be inaccurate, too heavy, or too complicated by some, gunmakers were constantly making improvements on the models and designs. These improvements were distinctly advantageous to the gunmaking industry. Because of these advances, over time combination guns increasingly became more popular. Not only was their

*It was also the start of target clubs and associations. In target shooting, members competed for prizes, and high honors were awarded to the best shots. The popularity of target shooting was later transferred to shooting games (*Schützenfeste*), and this in turn further stimulated interest in sporting arms among a wider section of the populace.



Three German hunters about to leave on a morning duck hunt.

versatility valued by the hunter, but their workmanship and beauty attracted collectors.

As with anything inherently collectible, guns with certain barrel configurations were more in demand than others as hunting habits and conditions shifted. We can see this is still true today. Game, diminished in some areas, flourishes in others because of environmental changes, and any change in the choice of prey will be

reflected in the selection of the firearm to be used in its pursuit.

Today, Europe remains the source of the combination gun because of tradition but also because a great number of species can still be hunted in the same area during the same time frame. Thus Europeans, especially those in the German-speaking countries as well as in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe, remain loyal to the combination gun.



INTRODUCTION TO HUNTING



Court hunts in the seventeenth century were elaborately staged.



Return from a mountain hunt.

GERMAN HUNTING GUNS OF THE GOLDEN ERA: 1840–1940



Prince Carl Friedrich (left) was heir to the principality of Wied-Neuwied, an area near Koblenz on the Rhine River. His brother, Prince Maximilian (right), was a noted naturalist who explored the Missouri River in 1832. They are posed here in their hunting gear, circa 1840.

INTRODUCTION TO HUNTING

Hunting party in the Rhine Palatinate about 1890.





This vintage photo shows a small hunting party of local businessmen and farmers near the village of Lockstedt in northern Germany at the turn of the twentieth century. This photograph was taken in the fall. On the far left the local pub owner poses with bottle and glass, trademark of his occupation. Undoubtedly, the members of this group had fortified themselves against the inclement weather by warming themselves with a traditional shot or two of “target” water to improve their aim!

The guns shown are all double-barrel hammer shotguns with the exception of the hammer drilling held by the seated gentleman in the center. His gun is a 16/16 gauge with an 11mm rifle barrel, a popular caliber at that time. One or two guns appear to be pinfire (Lefauchaux) shotguns, probably of Belgian manufacture. They show the characteristic hinged-steel fore-ends, underlevers, and ornate trigger guards. Slugs or possible buckshot (Rehposten) were used to bring down the roebuck deer.

GERMAN HUNTING GUNS OF THE GOLDEN ERA: 1840–1940

Game

Moose, male
 Moose, female and calves
 Red deer, male
 Fallow & sika deer, male
 Red, fallow & sika deer, female & calves
 Mouflon, male
 Mouflon, female & lambs
 Roe deer, male
 Roe deer, female mouflon
 Chamois
 Alpine marmots
 Brown hares & mountain hares
 Seals
 Badgers
 Pine marten & stone marten
 Capercaillie, black grouse, & crossbreeds
 Hazel grouse, ptarmigan, & rock ptarmigan
 Partridges
 Pheasants
 Wood pigeons
 Woodcocks
 Snipes & curlew
 Greater bustards
 Geese
 Ducks
 Buzzards, fish-eating ducks, & seagulls

	Januar	Februar	März	April	Mai	Juni	Juli	August	September	Oktober	November	Dezember
Jagdzeit =  open												
Schonzeit =  closed												
Männliches Eichwild												
Weibliches Eichwild und Elchkälber												
Männliches Rotwild												
Männliches Damwild und Sikawild												
Weibliches Rot-, Dam- und Sikawild sowie Kälber beiderlei Geschlechts									16			
Männliches Muffelwild												
Weibliches Muffelwild u. Muffelwildlämmer										16		
Männliches Rehwild									15			
Weibliches Rehwild und Rehkälber									16			
Gamswild												
Murmeltiere								16				
Hasen und Alpenhasen	15											
Robben								16				
Dachse												
Edel- und Steinmarder												
Auer-, Birk- und Rackelhähne					15							
Hasel-, Schnee- und Steinhühner												
Rebhühner									25			
Fasanen	15											
Ringeltauben				15								
Waldschnepfen				15								
Sumpfschnepfen (Bekassinen) u. Brachvögel												
Trapphähne												
Wildgänse (außer Brandgans)								16				
Wildenten (außer Eider- und Kolbenente)								16				
Mäuse- u. Rauhußbussarde, Säger u. Möwen												

This list, part of a 1937 German hunting license, shows clearly the overlapping hunting seasons of different game. A hunter, therefore, could stalk seals—if his hunting area included the coastline—as well as deer and ducks on the same day at the same location. A combination gun such as a drilling was the preferred hunting firearm of the day.

